

# A Qualitative Observations on the Azarbaijan Cultural Values in Terms of Hofstede`s Cultural Dimensions

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## Abstract

One of the most fundamental studies on culture in recent years is Dutch scientist Geert Hofstede`s study of the cultural dimension. This study shows what Hofstede's cultural dimensions; individualism-collectivism, power distance, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance and the countries` compliance with those dimensions. Additionally, attempts have been made to clarify through qualitative observations which dimensions Azerbaijani culture corresponds in Hofstede criterion.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, cultural dimensions, theory, Hofstede

## 1. Introduction

Managers currently tend to know ahead of time what factors are influencing working conditions and how workers should behave. By examining the culture of that society it is conceivable to know a person's behavior in advance. The implementation of Human Resources Management is different in every country because the economic, social, political and cultural factors that affect the implementation of HRM are different in each country. The concepts, approaches and practices in the field of HRM, which were once claimed to be universal and widely agreed, have become controversial today in terms of suitability and applicability. Studies show that different human resource management models are affected by different characteristics of the countries where they are applied and they are different from each other (Gasimov & Gurbanov, 2013: 165). After twenty years of independence, we now have twenty year old citizens who were born in 1991 in the independent country of Azerbaijan. Despite this, there is a great impact on our families, especially the biggest people of living families. Soviet attitudes. Today, the young generation faces obstacles in the choice of education and jobs due to the influence of their parents (Ahmadov, Jafarov, & Mammadova, 2016: 2). Of this purposes, the manager must adapt his style of work to the society's culture. Therefore, it is believed that management is linked to culture (Erdoğan & İlhan, 1991: 242/135). Rapidly evolving technology, the bad experiences of international corporations searching for new distribution markets, the Japanese model that has developed and implemented its own methods to the world industry and management, regardless of Western doctrines, and the challenges to globalisation, which have left their mark on our century, have called the only ideal management strategy into question.

The goal of this study, which focuses on the principles of work and management in different cultures and their impact on management, is to examine the concepts and forms of culture, and to suggest ways to solve problems arising from cultural differences in international governance.

## 2. Literature Review

Geert Hofstede conducted one of the most detailed studies concerning the impact of cultural values on the employee behavior. Unlike other scholars, Hofstede did not only examine managers, but also discovered a correlation between the occupations and the hierarchy of needs, and applied his study to various categories of work. In this study, which has a special role in the literature, Hofstede regarded culture as a factor that determines people's values and basic attitudes within and outside the organization. According to Hofstede, several variable patterns can be found in the cultures of the countries. Hofstede calls the four problem areas "cultural dimensions" backed by two surveys of 116,000 respondents from over 70 different countries around the world where IBM operates (Hofstede, 1984: 11). The values attached to the national culture have shaped a person from childhood by the help of the institutions that have transformed society

throughout history (family, education, religion, state, business environment). Changing those patterns in the later years of life is very difficult. Named by Hofstede, these dimensions are individualism-collectivism in which people present themselves as individuals or as members of a community, Power Distance in which people with less power perceive the unequal distribution of power, and Masculinity-Femininity which identifies values in society to be linked to whether materialism and initiation or relationships and quality of life, Uncertainty Avoidance which shows the extent to which individuals feel threatened in an uncertain situation.

### 3. Research Method

Observational and theoretical analysis approaches are being used in the course of the study to examine and assess the cultural values arising from the nature of the problem. Dimensions were developed in the qualitative observations. Such dimensions were presented using the works of local and foreign scholars, the history, literature, and sociology of Azerbaijan.

### 4. Cultural Dimensions

#### 4.1 Power Distance

Power is the ability to influence another person to do what one person wants (South, 2006: 19). It is important that everyone else perceives and accepts this power while it is being used. A leader with a legal status can resort to violence when he thinks his power is not sufficiently accepted (Arslan, 2001: 27).

There is inequality in every society. Some individuals are more effective at shaping others' behaviors because of their distinctive characteristics. Anyone can have physical strength, intelligence, wealth and social status. Talented athletes, artists, and scientists are generally well-off, but not wealthy, and have no political sanctions. In some countries, politicians may have power and status, but they are not rich. Business people have power and money, but no status. This discrepancy in different areas of inequality is known as a problem. In some societies, they try to resolve this discrepancy by creating compatibility in different areas. For instance, through being professional, athletes become wealthy, politicians become rich for their power, and businessmen gain prestige by fulfilling public duties. However, the balance is becoming more and more disturbed with these solutions (G. and G.J. Hofstede, 2005: 40)..

The power distance index determines the dependence of employees on managers. In societies with low power distances, employees are less dependent on managers and expect their managers to communicate with them when making decisions. Employees can negotiate with managers and disagree with the manager in countries with this structure. In societies where power distance is high, there is a dependency between employees and managers. All who work in these communities have two options. Firstly, they either accept or disregard this relation entirely. For the second case they either embrace the current regime or struggle for the new one. Consequently, the power distance in a particular country is a measure of the power that weak members of this country's institutions anticipate and accept. This institution can be a school, a family or a workplace. Therefore, power distance is based on less influential individuals' value judgements. For example, relying on the existing power distance, a teacher has certain powers over a student, a father has over a child, or a principal has over an employee. The distribution of power is largely determined by the behavior of those who are stronger. The distribution of power is thought to be determined by the behavior of managers, not employees (G. Hofstede & G. J. Hofstede, 2005: 45).

Power distance is the degree of inequality that the people of a country can normally accept in society. In other words, members of a community accept an unequal distribution of power. In societies with high distances of power, hierarchy means existential inequality. Power is the reality of society. Privileges and social status are constantly emphasized. Children are taught to abide by the rules. Societies that seek to reduce power-driven disparities represent a culture with a low level of power distance, while societies that seek to institutionalize power represent a culture with a high level of power distance.

#### 4.2 Individualism and Collectivism

Some people live in societies where the interests of groups are more important than the interests of the individual, while others live in societies where the interests of individuals predominate over the interests of groups (Hofstede, 1994: 50). What is the reason for this difference in societies?

Hofstede called societies in which the interests of individuals took precedence over the interests of the group "Individualist" and societies in which the interests of the group took precedence over the interests of the individual "Collectivist."

In individualist societies, individuals have an accountability to look after themselves and their families. Collectivism, the opposite of individualism, is valid in societies where people are born into strong groups. In these societies, people are under the lifelong protection of these groups in return for unconditional loyalty.

By definition, collectivism seems to refer to societies with close relationships. In such societies, people separate their groups from others. In these groups, individuals support each other faithfully. In communist cultures, control is an external social pressure, and shame plays a key role (Sargut, 2010: 185).

Hofstede argued that family structures could be the basis of this difference in society. Emphasizing that in individualist societies, the family consists of mother, father and child, Hofstede said that children growing up in these families begin to perceive themselves as independent individuals. When individuals evaluate others, they do so not based on their relationships with groups, but their personal behavior. Hofstede also stressed that children who grow up in these communities choose their peers with their own decisions. Within individualistic societies education is also intended to empower people to stand on their own feet.

Collectivist families are big families where other members of the family live together, such as mothers, fathers, children, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles and aunts. The idea of “we” begins to develop over time in children who grow up in these families. Yet the category of “we” is very different from that of “they”. On the “we” group, those people develop their identities. We may call these groups “in-groups” which build the concept of “we”. These in-groups are groups where an individual, with infinite loyalty and dedication, can be trusted in times of threat. In this sense, the practical and the psychological connection between the individual and his inner community grows.

Indicators of individualist cultures;

- Migration to big cities,
- Heavy industrialization,
- Strong media influence,
- Small family,
- Individual freedom and need for autonomy
- Self-sufficiency,
- Defining goals and objectives taking into account individual needs (Göregenli, 1997: 788-799).

Indicators of collectivistic cultures;

- Agricultural economy,
- Extended family,
- Family integration,
- Express personal goals and responsibilities based on subgroups,
- Strong differences between internal and external groups,
- Socialization based on loyalty,
- Search for trust and sincerity,
- Social support and solidarity (Göregenli, 1997: 788-799).

Sociologists have noted that individualism is more prevalent in industrialized Western societies than in other societies, especially in traditional developing societies (Oyserman et al., 2002: 3-4). Individualistic characteristics have been shown to characterize people in Western countries (Western Europe, North America, Australia), while non-Western characteristics (Asia, South America, and Africa) have been associated with collectivist values. Throughout Western cultures, Protestantism emphasized individual rights and equality, as well as individual personal choices. Because of this dimension, it was claimed that Western countries would have individual values with a protestant history and heritage (Oyserman et al., 2002: 3-4).

#### *4.3 Uncertainty Avoidance*

Greet Hofstede defines “uncertainty avoidance” as the creation of different beliefs and thoughts to avoid when people feel threatened by uncertain issues. The multiplicity of formal rules and control systems governing society, standard procedures and plans, emphasis on experience and career sustainability, and the tendency of individuals to take risks are different in cultures with high and low levels of uncertainty avoidance (Sıgrı ve Tıghı, 2006; 331).

People's attitudes to uncertainty stem from cultural values. People with low levels of tolerance for uncertainty are unable to adapt to uncertain situations; resist change. The success rate of these individuals decreases rapidly in knowledge-laden environments (Sargut, 2001: 139).

If people in a society tend to avoid uncertainty, it will be inevitable to increase job security, official and written laws, to oppose different thoughts and behaviors, and to return to the absolute truth in order to ensure the safety of life. It talks about the level of pressure on society, which is associated with unknown aspects of the future. People are dealing with serious difficulties in adjusting to an uncertain world. Individuals feel threatened in an environment where information is inaccurate or unclear, where there is confusion, and where changes are made rapidly and unexpectedly. Managers can be selected by criteria other than age. There is a strong ambition for high risk taking and individual development. You do not need to be an expert in the field managed by the manager. The hierarchy can be broken for pragmatic reasons (Sargut, 2001: 139).

In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, there is a greater need for formal rules and absolute truth than for cultures with low uncertainty avoidance; there are fewer concessions for individuals and groups who demonstrate different views and behaviors. Communities that show high uncertainty avoidance demonstrate relatively more sentimentality. These societies have high levels of anxiety and work stress. There is a high emotional response to change.

In societies with high uncertainty avoidance, individuals do not like change, prefer accuracy in their lives, and avoid risk (Aycan, 2000: 206).

According to experts, the need of countries with people who do not like uncertainty is high security. Countries such as Germany, Japan and Spain are the best examples. In countries with low uncertainty, people like to take risks. In cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance, such as Denmark and the United Kingdom, there is a greater interest in organization and there are more written rules. In other words, they are known as risk-averse individuals (Bakan vd, 2004: 86). Cultures with low levels of uncertainty avoidance make fewer plans and have fewer written rules. Uncertainty avoidance generally refers to people who are afraid of negative events. That is, people with a high level of uncertainty avoidance can be considered to be cautious. Uncertainty avoidance is a good variable for international marketers. Because imports and exports can sometimes be based on confidence. However, societies with a high level of uncertainty avoidance are generally reluctant to take risks and prefer written contracts to negotiations (Gegez vd, 2003: 116-117).

#### *4.4 Masculinity - Femininity*

This notion is related to the issue that prevailing value systems in society is closer to traditional characteristics of whether female or male roles (Aycan, 2000: 128).

Based on the dominant values reflected in society, it is possible to determine whether a culture is masculine or feminine. According to Hofstede, if courage, money-making, and materialist currents are the main values in a society, and the importance given to human beings is left in the background, it can be said that the dominant values of these societies bring forward Masculinity. In terms of Femininity indicators, human relations and the importance given to human beings come to the fore. Concepts associated with the change in society include values such as compassion, mercy, kindness, loyalty, and love for children. Those include thoughtfulness to others, situational empathy, affection and understanding, and warmth. On the other hand, when studying the traditional masculine values in societies, aggression, the desire to be promoted, to be relentless, athletic and competitive, self-confident, and oppressive come to the fore (Sargut, 2001: 175).

While conflicts are resolved in masculinity by fighting with the "may the best win" logic, in femininity there is reconciliation and discussion in conflict resolution (Duran, 2002: 49). Countries such as the United States, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are cited as examples of societies with masculinity values. Countries such as Portugal, Spain, France and Turkey show relative femininity. Anglo-Saxon countries such as Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands have a high femininity feature. Students with masculinity compete with their peers to excel in the classroom, while students with a femininity culture are adaptable, quiet, and friendly. While situations such as failure and not passing the class are of great importance to the student in the culture of masculinity, it has no meaning for the students in femininity culture because they think it is possible to solve the problem (Hofstede, 1991: 91). Adaptation to the business environment is the most important point in countries where femininity dominates. In countries dominated by masculinity, reconciliation and agreements are reached as a result of intense competition. Masculinity is the foundation of work life for people and career is important, femininity is what people strive to live, career is not as important as in masculinity culture. Masculinity culture means an ideal job for people, an environment where they can be promoted, where there will be competition. The culture of femininity represents an environment in which work will

provide social relations and help people (Hudgetts and Luthans, 1994: 49). In masculinity cultures, the manager is enterprising and aggressive. Femininity is thought to be the need for more opportunities to help in the workplace and to build social relationships in cultures, the manager is the person who seeks consensus (Hofstede, 1991: 95).

## 5. Dimensions

### 5.1 Dimensions 1. Cultural Dimension is High Power Distance in Azerbaijan.

Due to the Azerbaijani culture, from an early age in the family, the main priority is to be more obedient to parents and listen to their advice. During their lifetime, parents expect their children, regardless of their age, to obey and listen to them, and to fulfill their wishes, suggestions and desires immediately. At the same time, younger ones in the family are beginning to accept listening to older brothers and sisters as their duties.

Children who grow the first macro circle outside the family receive instructions from the kindergarten teacher to finish all the food on the plate in the preschool, to sit quietly during play and sleep. The student must stand up when the teacher arrives and speak when the teacher allows. When choosing a university and making decisions about the future, students' opinions about their choice are not taken into account. Not any self-discovery, yet the path chosen by the parent or teacher is accepted by the child.

As a rule, Azerbaijanis in the workplace are simply waiting for instructions on what to do. Managers, in turn, put a distance between themselves and employees, make them feel who has a right to comment at every step, and sometimes employees exaggerate managers and feel embarrassed and frightened when they see their manager. They conclude that asking too many questions will annoy the boss, and it is not considered a usual case for a young employee to move to a higher position very soon. Based on all these indicators, it can be concluded that the power distance in the cultural dimension of Azerbaijan is high.

### 5.2 Dimensions 2. Cultural Dimension is High Uncertainty Avoidance in Azerbaijan

In the Azerbaijani tradition, talking to the water when you dream, changing your path when you see a black cat, the interpretation of an even or odd sneeze, the pray of patience while experiencing hardships, the pray of abundance, the pray of tribulation and other prays are recited to prevent tragedies or to strengthen patience. All those prays come from Islam religion. In terms of business, public affairs are preferred despite of less profit compared to the private sector. The reason for this is the possibility of the public sector to provide lifelong employment. When asked for a salary, a monthly rather than an annual salary request can be considered another indicator of stability. Based on all these indicators, it can be concluded that the uncertainty avoidance in Azerbaijan's cultural dimension is high.

### 5.3 Dimensions 3. Cultural Dimension is Collectivism in Azerbaijan

The household is not just made up of parents, grandparents are often members of these individuals. It is normal for uncles, aunts, and cousins to visit and give advice, as well as to form a joint family budget from the income of the brothers living in the same house due to marriage. Even gathering, playing, and eating, whose first letters in Azerbaijani literally creates a "wedding", is again a sign of collectivity. In addition, the mass holding of weddings and mourning ceremonies (200-500 people), the participation of long-distance guests, relatives and acquaintances in the ceremony are also signs of collectiveness. In Azerbaijani culture, a child feels compelled to marry a girl or a boy whom the family considers worthy. Here again, we can see that the individual is self-sacrificing for the sake of the group.

We can see the same in the workplace, where the interests of the group to which they belong are preferred to their own interests. Loyalty to a manager, being a trustworthy person, and working in harmony with other employees are among the most important responsibilities expected of an employee.

Based on all these indicators, it can be seen that the cultural dimension of Azerbaijan correspond to the collective.

### 5.4 Dimensions 4. Cultural Dimension is Femininity in Azerbaijan

An Azerbaijani man is compassionate, honest, has a good relationship with people, defends the weak, and does not hold Machiavelist ideas. During a performance appraisal, it is checked if an employee with a low score has a family member who is sick or has a problem before being reprimanded, and the result of the appraisal is considered invalid, if there is any. Based on all these indicators, it can be said that Azerbaijan's cultural dimension correspond to femininity.

## 6. Discussion

After the Contract of the Century in 1995, the interest of foreign investors in our country has grown rapidly, a large number of foreign companies have entered the country, and today this process continues with the opening of foreign hotels in the country due to the development of tourism. Of course, foreigners dominate among those who hold high positions in these companies and hotels. This, in turn, raises the issue of intercultural differences. The purpose of

writing this article is to reveal the cultural dimension of Azerbaijan and to eliminate the problems of intercultural differences.

### 7. Overall Assessment and Outcome

The importance of culture in organizations is growing. Globalization has become one of the factors motivating the acceleration of this process. Given the intercontinental activities of organizations, which are no longer just one region, the importance of intercultural management comes into view once again.

We can also define culture as the transmission of beliefs, values, and habits from generation to generation. Culture is formed and shared by people, it is not inherited, it is gained through experience, it is a boundary that puts the culture to which it belongs.

Azerbaijani culture is a unique cultural system formed in the environment of the past and present. In terms of the features that define the Hofstede cultural system, Azerbaijan's cultural values correspond to a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, a high power distance, femininity, and collectivism.

As can be seen, the Azerbaijani management system differs from the western management system in a contradictory way. To show this difference more clearly, it is necessary to define an Azerbaijani-type management system.

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